



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM



By William Shakespeare
Directed by Geoffrey Kent

BLUE MOUNTAIN ARTS
PRESENTS
C O L O R A D O
S H A K E S P E A R E
F E S T I V A L

Study Guide Table of Contents:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Plot Synopsis | 1 |
| Characters..... | 2 |
| Meet the Author..... | 3 |
| Themes of the play..... | 4 |
| Production History..... | 5 |
| Critical Context: | |
| Original Production..... | 5 |
| Meaning of Title: | |
| What is Midsummer?... | 5 |
| Source Material..... | 6 |
| Elizabethan Folklore | 6 |
| Discussion Questions | 6 |
| Classroom Activities..... | 8 |

Plot Synopsis

Theseus, Duke of Athens, will wed Hippolyta in four days. The couple is interrupted by Egeus, whose daughter Hermia loves Lysander, but Egeus would have her marry Demetrius. Demetrius is eager to marry Hermia, and scorns Helena's love for him. Theseus gives Hermia four days, until his own wedding, to let her decide if she will obey her father, die, or join a nunnery. Hermia and Lysander choose to flee, and Helena relays the plan to Demetrius. Meanwhile, a group of artisans gather to rehearse a play to celebrate the Duke's wedding, led by Peter Quince and starring the inimitable Bottom.

In the woods, Fairy King and Queen, Oberon and Titania, argue over a young changeling child. In an attempt to sway Titania's affection, Oberon commands his fairy servant, Puck, to pluck a magical flower whose drops will convince a sleeping individual to love its first waking sight. Oberon also sends Puck in pursuit of Helena and Demetrius, hoping that the magical drops will remedy the quarreling he has overheard.

Oberon puts the love potion in sleeping Titania's eye, and Puck places it in Lysander's, whom Puck mistakes for Demetrius. Puck eventually adds the magic drops to sleeping Demetrius' eye, and both gentlemen wake to see Helena first, and fall madly in love. Hermia is appalled that both men would abandon her so suddenly for Helena. While these lovers clash, they soon tire, and fall asleep. Titania, upon waking, sees Bottom, who has entered the woods at midnight to rehearse the play. The mischievous Puck has transformed Bottom's head into that of a donkey, and Titania, under the influence of the love drops, loves Bottom ardently.

Satisfied, Oberon administers an antidote to all affected lovers. Lysander awakes and loves Hermia again, Demetrius loves Helena after all, and Titania stirs to see Bottom and flees to unite with Oberon.

All the lovers, disoriented yet content, join with Theseus and Hippolyta to celebrate their marriage and watch an awful production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Puck begs the audience to imagine that it was all a dream.

The Four Levels of Action

One way to clarify the numerous plots in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is to separate the four different story lines as they weave and overlap:

1) Theseus and Hippolyta belong to the court world, and as characters they stand for reason and law. They frame the story with a stable relationship, and Theseus stands by Egeus' claim over Hermia in applying the Athenian law. In general, Theseus is the realist, and mentions his distrust of imagination and dreams.

2) The young lovers, Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius, and Helena, almost blur together with their many similarities, in appearance and personality. Young and passionate, in love and rebellious, they move us from court to forest and easily fall under the magical influence of the woods. They experience many difficult characteristics of love, including inconsistency, madness, and irrationality.

3) Oberon and Titania are royalty in the fairy world, and they are able to influence love with their own magic and power. These characters are intrinsically connected with nature, and the trouble in their marriage results in the entire natural world, including weather, being upturned. Puck represents the more sinister feelings about fairies in Elizabethan folklore, but ultimately his pranks remain lighthearted and good-natured.

4) The characters known as the "mechanicals" or "artisans" – Bottom and company – are laborers around the English estate. Scholar Marjorie Garber equates the word "mechanical" to a modern day "mechanic." They work as laborers, and accidentally mock the conventions of theater with their attempt to put on a play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. These characters are somewhat absurd and oblivious, which is evident again when Puck turns Bottom's head into that of a donkey, without Bottom even knowing he has been "translated."

Character Descriptions

The Court World

Theseus: The Duke of Athens, and soon to wed Hippolyta. The main figure of law and reason in a play filled with chaos and confusion.

Hippolyta: An Amazonian Queen who is going to marry Theseus soon. Although Theseus won her hand in battle, they are in love as they marry.

Egeus: Hermia's father who favors Demetrius as the suitor to wed his daughter. He approaches Theseus to bring Hermia under Athenian law stating a daughter must obey her father's wishes in marriage.

Philostrate: A court counselor.

The Young Lovers

Hermia: Egeus' daughter, in love with Lysander. Hermia is faced with the choice to marry Demetrius, become a nun, or die. Hermia and Lysander escape to a nearby wood to pursue true love.

Lysander: A young man in love with Hermia. Lysander is looked down upon by Hermia's father, yet he tells Egeus that he is of equal birth and standing as Demetrius.

Demetrius: A lover of Hermia, yet the court knows he loved Helena in the past. He now seeks to marry Hermia with her father's blessing, but Hermia does not love him. He follows Hermia and Lysander to the forest in order to win Hermia's love.

Helena: A young woman who loves Demetrius and knows he once loved her. Also a childhood friend of Hermia's, these two girls are described as having a long and loving friendship. Helena begins the play angry and hurt that Demetrius favors Hermia so much and no longer cares for her.

The Fairies

Oberon: The King of the Fairies. Oberon has Puck in his command. Oberon is upset about the attention his Fairy Queen Titania gives a young changeling child instead of himself, and this jealousy causes him to take action to regain power.

Titania: The Queen of the Fairies, Titania is caught up taking care of an Indian changeling boy to the point of disrupting her marriage with Oberon. After Puck puts a magic potion in her eye, she falls passionately in love with the first person she sees— an ass-headed Bottom!

Puck: Oberon's servant, and a troublemaker in the fairy world. Puck is obedient to Oberon, yet in sly and mischievous ways Puck takes orders into his own hands and causes goodhearted trouble for the young lovers and Titania.

The Rude Mechanicals

Peter Quince: A carpenter, and Prologue in the Interlude, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Quince is the ringleader of the mechanical gang. He distributes the roles of their play, and tries to keep the group together as they begin to unravel.

Nick Bottom: A weaver, and Pyramus in the Interlude. Scholar Harold Bloom notes that a "bottom" for a weaver is the center of the skein upon which the weaver's wool is wound, and so is Bottom the core of this group.

Francis Flute: A bellows-mender, and Thisbe in the Interlude. A bellows-mender would repair bellows, an instrument that blows air into a fire and increases the heat.

Snug: A joiner, also the Lion in the Interlude. A joiner is a type of carpenter that cuts and fits joints in wood.

Tom Snout: A tinker, and also the Wall in the Interlude. A tinker most commonly works with tin, and often fixes utensils in the household.

Robin Starveling: A tailor, and Moonshine in the Interlude. A tailor makes repairs to garments including suits, coats, and dresses.

FUN FACT: Shakespeare scholar Harold Bloom declares *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be Shakespeare's "first undoubted masterwork, without flaw, and one of his dozen or so plays of overwhelming originality and power."

MEET THE AUTHOR

by Joe Bicknell

Shakespeare's Life

Based upon baptismal records, scholars believe that William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. He died on that same date, April 23, in 1616, in the community of his birth. His body was interred in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, where his tomb can be viewed today. Varying amounts are known about Shakespeare's life in the intervening years.

The Early Years

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary came from a prominent Warwickshire family, something that no doubt helped her husband gain a number of local political positions, in addition to being a glove maker and tanner. It is likely that young William, the third-born of the family, attended the best grammar school in the area, since, as an Alderman, John Shakespeare was entitled to free public education for his children. It was here, at King Edward IV Grammar School in Stratford, that it is believed the playwright learned much of the history, language and geography that form the backdrop for many of his plays.

At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a well-known and prosperous land owner in Warwickshire, a woman eight years his senior. Six months later, their first daughter, Susanna was born. Twins Hamnet and Judith soon followed in February 1585. Hamnet later died at age eleven, which affected Shakespeare deeply. Both Susanna and Judith, as well as Anne, survived Shakespeare and were mentioned in his Last Will and Testament.

The Move To London

It appears that Shakespeare left Stratford in 1584, and under cloudy circumstances. His father had run into both financial and political difficulties (some suggest because of his continuing Roman Catholic sympathies), and there is some evidence that the young

man had been accused of poaching from the estate of the wealthy Sir Thomas Lucy, said to be the later object of satire in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. From the time of Shakespeare's leaving Stratford, until he re-surfaced as an actor in London in 1592, almost nothing is known. It is also at about that time that the authorities closed the theaters due first to riots, and then to the plague. They remained closed for two years, until 1594.

It is also about this time that it appears that Shakespeare first published his verse, including *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and *The Sonnets*. Publishing was still in its infancy at this time, as literacy was beginning to increase among the middle class. So it clearly was a departure from his already growing reputation as a playwright – and likely a way to try to supplement his income while the theaters were closed.

From 1594 onward, Shakespeare worked as a playwright and performer for the acting company, Lord Pembroke's Men and later the Lord Chamberlain's Men. At the accession of James I, in 1603, upon the death of Elizabeth I, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became known as The King's Men. The records are clear that Shakespeare's company was the most favored at Court, with more numerous performances than any other company for a king who loved the theater even more than his predecessor, Elizabeth, also an avid fan of Shakespeare's work. It is likely because of this royal interest and patronage that Shakespeare prospered in the theater world of London, becoming part owner of several theaters, including the Globe and the Blackfriar's Theater, as well as retaining a financial stake in the various companies for whom he both wrote and acted.

The Return to Stratford

Because of the ensuing financial success and widespread acclaim as a royal favorite, Shakespeare was able to redeem himself in Stratford by the year 1596. In 1597 he purchased a house and gardens, New Place, in Chapel Street in Stratford. It was to this home that, in about 1510, Shakespeare returned from London. Though there is evidence that several of his last plays were written while in Stratford, he seemed to have lived the life of a retired gentleman, engaging himself in local affairs, as well as in the lives of his surviving children. Both had married: Susanna to a local, well-regarded Stratford physician and Judith, but two months before Shakespeare's death, to a local vintner. It may well have been in response to this nuptial that Shakespeare drafted his Last Will and Testament on

March 25, 1616. The document, seemingly prepared in haste, with many erasures and editions, contains three of the only six known true signatures of William Shakespeare. Other than a fragment of a play called *Sir Thomas More*, a collaboration with one or more other Renaissance playwrights of uncertain identity, nothing exists in Shakespeare's actual hand.

Death and the First Folio

William Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616, at the age of 52 years. Despite his fame and good fortune, in reality, most of Shakespeare's plays were never published during his lifetime. In 1623, several of Shakespeare's partners in the King's Men acting company, and some associated publishers, published the First Folio of Shakespeare's works, the first publication of over half of the known works of Shakespeare. It was done to try to capitalize on the continuing fame of Shakespeare's works, especially among the rising middle class. The publication of the First Folio highlights the great success Shakespeare had enjoyed, not only commercially, but also artistically. His plays carried important messages for the audiences of his day, but they also speak to lovers of theater and great literature of all times and places.

Themes of the Play

Marriage

The celebration of marriage is intricately woven into the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The play itself was written to celebrate a royal wedding. The play begins with the prospect of Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding, and ends with three marriages and resolution of conflict and disorder. For a play to end with marriage is a clear indication of a comedy, as well as the general intention towards celebration.

Power of Imagination and Dreaming

A Midsummer Night's Dream is filled with confusion and characters that have profound experiences within a dream-like state. Under the influence of a magic potion, Titania falls in love with Bottom, whose head has been turned into that of a donkey. The young lovers Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius and Helena all come under the influence of the magic potion, and end up similarly confused. When the lovers emerge from the woods, they all conclude that their experience was a dream, yet their lives have been inexplicably and permanently altered. The power of imagination and dreaming allows these characters to rearrange in the woods, and emerge with resolve they did not have earlier.

Doting v. Real Love

In the play we see love described in two ways, as real love and as "doting." Shakespeare scholar Harold F. Brooks describes doting as an unequal love or obsession. Brooks calls doting this idea of love as more appealing than the love itself. Early in the play we find Titania "doting" upon the changeling child, and her obsessive care angers Oberon. Helena is described as doting on Demetrius while he is in love with Hermia. By the end of the play, these inequities are balanced and characters find true love when the affection is balanced and mutual.

Love's Difficulties

In the beginning of the play we hear the line "the course of true love never did run smooth," and this timeless sentiment echoes in every heart that has felt the confusion and trouble surrounding romantic love. Theseus won Hippolyta in war, and the young lovers must go through a terrible mix-up and confusion in the forest before they are resolved. The adults in the court world, Theseus and Egeus, wish to tell Hermia whom to marry, acknowledging that young love is wild and changing. Yet the young lovers will not listen and choose to flee rather than tame their passion for one another. Despite the trouble and confusion, we find that true love wins out in the end as each lover marries their true love.

FUN FACT: *The Tempest* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are two of the other plays that do not have direct sources for their plots. It was extremely common for Shakespeare to retell and reimagine storylines that were already commonly known from other literary sources.

Our Production

England After World War I

Bright Young People

England was experiencing major cultural changes post-World War I. After witnessing so much devastation and loss, the youth of 1920s England was distinctly opposed to the values and culture of the older generation. While they had been too young to fight in World War I, their fathers had. One group of teenagers was infamously known as the Bright Young People. This middle-class group of artists and aristocrats invented youth culture with their wild parties and games, frivolity and extravagant living. Their decadent lifestyle was inspired by the horror of World War I, which led to a heightened awareness of hopelessness and the shortness of life.

The younger generation was aware of the values held by the older generation including modesty, responsibility, and hard work, yet there was a lingering bitterness over what it had cost in young men's lives to defend these values. Embracing their own second-rateness in comparison with the heroes of the generation before, the dreams of this younger generation shifted alongside the decline of the British aristocracy after World War I.

Changing Role of Women in the 1920s

Another fascinating aspect of England in the 1920s was the changing role of women post-World War I. The lifestyle and codes that upper class women were expected to fill had been destroyed by the war, and so the next generation adapted and changed. Women were given the full vote in 1928, and trends of drinking, smoking, and shorter skirts were increasing the sense of liberation among women. Single women were going to work and earning their own spending money, as well as gaining equal property, the right to divorce, and ownership of children rights. Women were a key part of the flapper sub-culture, which was connected to the explosion of jazz in the 1920s.

1920s Jazz Culture

The first jazz record sold commercially was entitled "Livery Stable Blues," cut in 1917 by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band was a huge hit in England as well as America, and the Jazz Age was widely popular all around the world. The older generation of music critics found jazz to be offensive and unorthodox, despite its immense popularity. Jazz, also known as "hot music," gained popularity on British stages throughout the 1920s and was fitting for the attitudes of recklessness in post-World War I youth culture.

Critical Context

Original Production

The exact date of the first production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not certain, but it is commonly believed that the play was written for a noble wedding in the mid-1590s. There are several realistic hypotheses for which wedding it could have been. Since the play is traditionally dated in the mid-1590s, it matches up with the wedding of the Earl of Oxford's daughter Elizabeth to the Earl of Derby. This wedding was one of very few aristocratic weddings that took place in the middle of the decade. Another possible wedding would have been the 1594 union of two rival families, that of Sir Thomas Heneage and Mary Browne Wriothesley, who married during the 'rites of May.' This play, more than any other, offers direct compliments to Queen Elizabeth, and also fits better than any other comedy to be presented at a noble wedding.

Meaning of Title: What is Midsummer?

The festival "Midsummer Night" is traditionally held on June 23rd or 24th, and is celebrated with music, dancing, and a range of superstitious activities. This time of year was known for the heat and resulted in a certain "madness" or altered state of mind. However, in the play Theseus also makes a reference to the rites of May Day, and so *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might in fact be meant to line up with that holiday. The title

of the play has a casual tone, and there is no exactness as to which day of Midsummer is being referred to, or whose dream we are taking part in. The moon is a constant motif in the play, and traditionally the moon is a symbol of madness – it’s where we get words like “lunatic” and “lunacy.” The themes of madness and superstition fit with the dreamlike nature of the events in the play. While chaos and confusion may take place during Midsummer, these characters are rewarded with resolve and merriment in the end.

Source Material

Unlike the majority of Shakespeare’s plays, there is no direct place or single plot source from which the story has been lifted. However, there are several threads in the play that Shakespeare did not create himself. Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* contains the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The names and stories of Theseus and Hippolyta come from Greek mythology. The theme of a mischievous spirit known as a “Puck” as well as the holiday of a Midsummer Night or May Day were embedded in English tradition. The tale of the Golden Ass from Apuleius’ *Metamorphosis*, not to be confused with Ovid’s work, contains a story of a man accidentally turned to a donkey for a series of trials and misadven-

tures. However, unlike the majority of Shakespeare’s other works, the plot of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is not a direct steal from a specific literary work.



Elizabethan Folklore

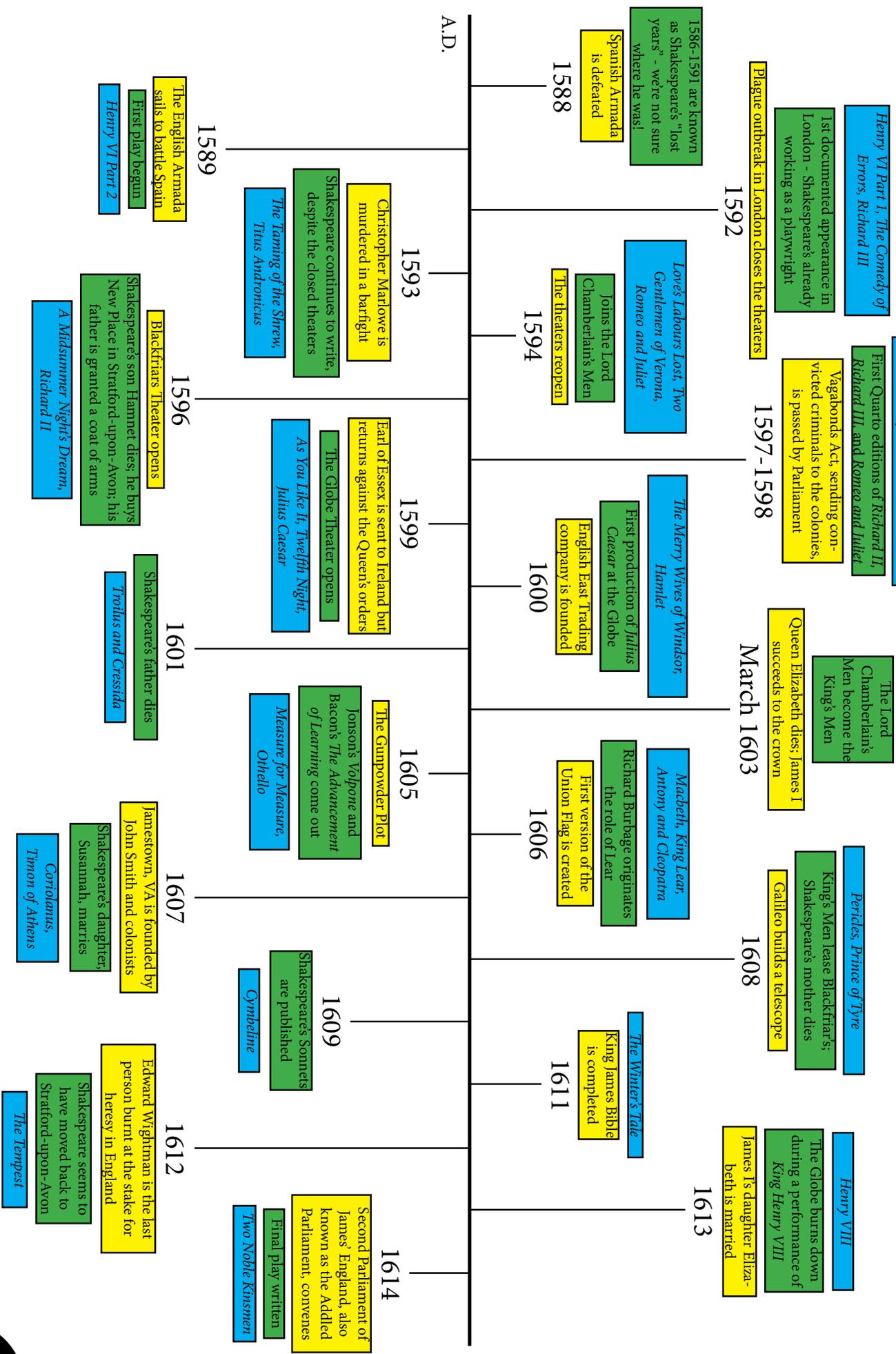
In Elizabethan folklore, a “Puck” was a common name for a trickster spirit that would roam in the English countryside. A family could have a “Puck” in the home or out near a forest or body of water. A “Puck” was also referred to as Robin Goodfellow or a Hobgoblin, in order to not summon a spirit of the devil by referring to it by its real name. The use of superstition, myths, and folklore were popular explanations for a variety of situations before the Enlightenment era, which utilized the scientific method, logic, and reason to explain the world.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Is the nature of love as inconstant and transferable as Theseus believes for the young lovers? He would have Hermia choose Demetrius, and advises her to change her passions. Would Hermia be right to listen to her father, or does the nature of love not allow us to choose who we fall in love with?
- 2) In the play, the mechanicals are extremely concerned that their audience will become too caught up in the illusion of their play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Is this something artists should be concerned with? Does it matter if an audience is aware they are watching a play, movie, or fantasy? Is an audience ever in danger of believing an illusion too completely?
- 3) Is it wrong for Oberon to interfere in the events of the young lovers with the magic potion? His intentions are to help, but arguably he creates chaos. Does it matter if someone’s intentions are good, but they don’t have a positive impact?
- 4) At different times in history, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has been viewed as a ridiculous play, yet it remains one of the most popular plays ever produced. Is there timeless merit in the play, and if so, what is it? Is it worthy of being an enduring and admired play, or is the plot too silly to be considered worthy of success and recognition through the ages?

Timeline KEY

- Period History
- Shakespeare History
- Play Relation



A.D.

Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Match famous lines from the play. . .



*Lord, what fools
these mortals be!*

Hermia

*And though she be but
little, she is fierce.*

*So quick bright things
come to confusion.*

Bottom

*Love looks not with
the eyes, but with the
mind, And therefore
is winged Cupid
painted blind.*

My heart / Is true as steel

Puck

Helena



*A lion among ladies is a
most dreadful thing*

Lysander

*The course of true love
never did run smooth.*



Glossary

abjure — solemnly renounce.
adamant — legendary stone of impenetrable hardness.
auditor — a listener.
avouch — assert.
bootless — without gain.
by'r lakin — “By our lady-kin,” or “by our little (dear) lady.”
canker-blossom — decaying flower, or that which infects and decays a flower.
chid — scolded.
collied — darkened.
con — learn.
disfigure — Bottom is confusing “figure,” or “symbolize,” with “disfigure,” or “deface.”
eyne — eyes.
gawds — showy knick-knacks.
lode-stars — bright, easily found stars used for navigation, like the North Star.
odious — foul-smelling.
odorous — sweet-smelling.

loam — paste of clay and sand used for plastering walls.
mazed — amazed.
neaf — hand.
nole — head.
pale — a space or field having bounds; enclosure.
paramour — a lover, especially one in an adulterous relationship.
paragon — a perfect, peerless example.
pard — leopard.
parlous — perilous.
peascod — pea pod
promontory — high ridge of land or rock jutting out into the water.
quern — a hand-turned grain mill.
rash — ill-considered and hasty.
savors — scents.
scrip — a scrap of paper with a list or schedule written on it.
surfeit — excessive amount.

triple Hecate — the triple goddess of magic and crossroads.
vestal — virgin or nun.
votaress — faithful female follower.
wanton — a promiscuous woman.
woo'd — insane, rabid. Possibly “wooed,” as in “courted” or “seduced.”

Who's Line Key:

The course of true love never did run smooth.
 (Lysander)
So quick bright things come to confusion.
 (Lysander)
My heart / Is true as steel
 (Helena)
A lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing
 (Bottom)
Lord, what fools these mortals be!
 (Puck)
And though she be but little, she is fierce.
 (Helena)
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
 (Hermia)

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival
Study Guide
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Edited by Hadley Kamminga-Peck & Heidi Schmidt
Design and Layout: Emily Scraggs
Contributing Writers: Bianca Gordon, Hadley Kamminga-Peck, Joe Bicknell
© 2013



We would like to thank the following supporters of CSF Education:

Blue Mountain Arts, Boulder Arts Commission, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Colorado Council on the Arts, CU Outreach, CSF Guild, Debra Ordway and Beyond the Horizon, Elevations Federal Credit Union Foundation, President's Fund for the Humanities, Target Foundation, Riddle Family Foundation, Wyman Historic District Neighborhood Association, Arts and Sciences Community Involvement (ASCI).

CSF Education
www.coloradoshakes.org/education-outreach
(303) 492-1973
csfedout@colorado.edu
CSF Box Office
(303) 492-8008
www.coloradoshakes.org